

**Political History Collection  
Interview H.0054.05 : Tape 5**

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**Location of Interview:** Dharamsala, India  
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**Language of Interview:** Tibetan  
**Interviewed by:** Melvyn Goldstein and Paljor Tserong  
**Name:** Lhamo Tsering [Tib. lha mo tshe ring]  
**Gender:** Male  
**Age:** 71  
**Date of Birth:** 1924

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## **Abstract**

Lhamo Tsering was the secretary-aide of Gyalo Thondup and was part of the second group of Tibetans trained by the CIA in America in 1958-59. After returning to India, he came to manage much of the CIA's operation in Tibet for Gyalo Thondup. In this interview, he discusses American involvement in Tibet. He also discusses the arms drops, and his training in America.

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## **Tape 5**

**Q:** In 1960, an American representative came to Delhi from the Eisenhower administration. They did not meet the President, but petitions were sent through Indira Gandhi. Phünkang Lhajam helped during the meeting and Tharchin Babu was also there. So were Andru and Baba Yeshe. I (Alo Chöndze) said that 'Gyalo Thondup had tricked us and since the Americans listened to him, we lost the war in Kham, as well as in Lhasa. We Tibetans had great hope that the Americans would fight the Communists. So in the future, the Americans should not listen to Gyalo Thondup,' and our main hope was Phünkang Lhajam and we made all of our requests through her. I told the others [this] and Andru said it was correct. However, Phünkang Lhajam would not translate [this], and so Tharchin Babu did. We told the Americans not to have contact with Gyalo Thondup and Shakabpa. They were just using His Holiness's name. You can also ask Baba Yeshe and Phünkang Lhajam [about this]. After that, we made several requests to the Americans, and they replied directly--on what, I don't know. So what do you think about this?

**A:** Now, I must tell you what I know. Since this is for a history book, one must give reliable answers and one cannot tamper with the truth. What I know is that when Eisenhower came, they did indeed go. The manner in which they did, that I don't know. Gombo Tashi did go and Alo Chöndze was there because, at that time, many representatives of the Dedön Tsogpa were there. I'm not sure, but there was something like 300 people [there]. At that time, I was not concerned with this work and all I know is what I heard.

It's said that Andru Gombo Tashi said he met Eisenhower and he gave him a full set of Khamba dress [clothes]. Other than that, I don't know what preparations were made and who the translator was, et cetera. Secondly, regarding the statement that Gyalo Thondup was responsible for losing the war in Kham and Lhasa, this, in my opinion, is not correct at all. The reason being that the region in Kham is very large. For example, in Kanze there are 18 districts, and then there is Chamdo and so many others. Everywhere, the rebellion was taking place. However, our and Sawangchemmo's connections were only with Litang. Just one dzong. It's possible that Litang and Batang were together. Gyado Wangdü was sent to this area to help regarding arms. When he got there, he was able to make connections. We were trying to get information on the number of arms, ammunition, and people, so they had to send us this information. And while we were sending information back and forth, the Chinese had already surrounded the place. The wireless sets were buried underground, and so we could not drop [the arms]. So as I see it, this did cause some harm, and I have stated this clearly in my book. From my side, I cannot accept the statement that all of Kham was harmed because that was not the situation at all. Then what else?

**Q:** Regarding losing the war in Lhasa.

**A:** That was also not the case. We did send Lotse and Athar. However, Gombo Tashi and others started the Chushigandru and went to Drigutang. Gyalo Thondup had no connection with Lhasa at all. There the uprising took place.

**Q:** It was not possible to drop the arms in Kham. What happened?

**A:** Before one drops arms, one has to find out what arms are already there. Sometimes you have a lot of bullets and no guns, and then the other way around too. So one has to know whether bullets should be dropped or guns. So while the information was being exchanged back and forth, the Chinese had surrounded Litang—the place where Gyado Wangdü was. So there was nothing to do but flee, and all the wireless sets were buried. The connection was broken. So since the connection was broken, it was impossible to drop arms. It was not possible to say where the plane should come, where to drop, and there were so many things to do [prepare]. So since we could not [make] drops, the area was lost.

**Q:** So it took time to exchange information?

**A:** Yes, it took time. There were no immediate exchanges. No proper information was given, that was the fault. So the main problem was that we could not have proper communications, and at that time, the Chinese had surrounded them. So we did not know what happened to them, and they did not know what our plans were. Without the wireless, planes could not be sent. Signals had to be given. From so many thousands, they had to say where they were. So because we could not make the connection, we lost. So if one wants to say that this was really the fault of Gyalo Thondup, then one can say that. However, there were [other] reasons. [Ones] that I have clearly stated in my book.

**Q:** He [Alo Chöndze] speaks as if he, Baba Yeshe, and Andru were together.

**A:** At that time, I'm not sure, but I know clearly that Andru Jinda was there. They were probably there. [Question misunderstood.]

**Q:** No, I mean were Phünkang and them in agreement with each other?

**A:** That I don't know. But if that was the case, they would not have come to Gyalo Thondup.

**Q:** What I mean is, when Alo Chöndze said, "Isn't that right," Andru Jinda said, "Yes, that's correct." This speaks as if they were together [in agreement]. From what I know, it seems that they were not together.

**A:** If Andru Jinda had said that what Alo Chöndze said was correct, then it follows that he had no belief in Gyalo Thondup, Khenjung and Shakabpa. If that was the case, then there was no need for him to approach Gyalo Thondup. They could have worked with Phünkang Lham. As I see it, this is not the truth, but I cannot say so 100 percent.

**Q:** In here it's said that they told the Americans not to believe in Gyalo Thondup.

**A:** Andru Jinda and Baba Yeshe had 100 percent faith, and so the Mustang base was established, right? This continued for 14 years. The Americans assisted three times. Later, until the Americans stopped their aid and until we had internal problems, the Americans continued their assistance. If the Americans did not have faith, they would not have done that much, right? So that in [and of] itself speaks for it. Besides that, all other kinds of work were done. Intelligence groups were established in Tibet, and also wirelasses. This was all done because they had faith [in Gyalo Thondup]. If they did not have faith, they would not have done it. So this [Alo's statement], in my opinion, is not correct. If they did not have faith, then the connection would have been cut by then [1960]. They would have worked with Phünkang Lham, and Alo Chöndze, Gyalo Thondup and Shakabpa would not have had any work. For whatever reason, the Mustang base was formed, and why did they continually assist for 14 years? That itself speaks for it.

**Q:** His Holiness came to India in 1956. At that time, Taktse Rimpoche also came, and he said that he came with an American.

**A:** That I don't know [about].

**Q:** In 1956, some were saying that His Holiness should stay and others that he should return. Around this time, did the Americans say that they were definitely going to help, or was that a bit later on? His Holiness was at Gangtok and then he left. Was there definite help before that?

**A:** At that time, I don't know for sure. I was not in it. I knew [there] definitely [was] in 1957 when Athar and Gyado Wangdü were sent, even then I was not told. After they were taken by Yabshi's Cook [to east Pakistan], the car had returned and there were clothes in it. I asked what all of those clothes and shoes were. He said that at night they had to take some Khambas for training. Even when they were sent, I did not know.

**Q:** Before that you did not know?

**A:** Before that I didn't know what connections Gyalo Thondup had with the Americans. I knew towards the end of '57. I was sent in the second batch for training.

**Q:** When Athar returned and went to Calcutta, you knew about that?

**A:** Yes, that I knew. I have it all in my book. All about what the Americans said, what was replied, what their plans were, et cetera.

**Q:** So from what aspects did the Americans say that they were going to help? Altogether, about six to seven went for training.

**A:** To the States?

**Q:** No, to Okinawa and Guam.

**Q:** You mean the total number of people?

**A:** No, the first time.

**Q:** About six or so.

**Q:** So when they were dropped, were they forming a group and training?

**A:** Yes. At that time, the rebellion was taking place all over. And so the idea was to get in touch and to train and improve the organization and drop arms. If wireless people were not sent, then we would not have had communications.

**Q:** So the idea was to train in guerrilla warfare, ambush, et cetera?

**A:** Yes.

**Q:** And did the Americans want information? Getting Chinese documents, et cetera?

**A:** When they asked how many people were there and what arms there were, that information they automatically got. No Chinese documents were collected. The Americans at that time were talking about independence of the races [Tib. mirig rangwang rangzen] [probably self-determination]. They were trying to stop the communists and that was their objective. Ours was independence. So, from this perspective, they were getting information.

**Q:** The Chushigandru formed and went to Drigutang, and later, Namseling and Samjola went there and they started getting various people to fight from the various dzongs. Some say that they had so much hope and just waited for the arms to be dropped, but they [arms] did not come. So what was the reason that they were not dropped? What was the problem? Was the American policy to see how things went before helping, or did we just have too much hope? Was it communication problems?

**A:** Until the Lo Mustang organization began in 1960, the Americans did not help with arms. For Drigutang, they bought Japanese, Czechoslovakian, and Russian arms, and dropped them. They did not actually come forth. I have a feeling that at that time they were just testing us, though I cannot speak for them for sure. However, when they agreed to do drops, they did make drops and there was no problem with communication. But they were not their arms. Only at the time of Jagra Pembar did they say that they would assist. So after that, all of the arms were American.

**Q:** Some are saying that there were so many people and so few arms. Did they not send any messages saying that they needed arms?

**A:** They did, but the Americans were not going to drop arms without all the details. For example, if I say I have 30,000 people, the Americans are not going to say okay. That's not how the Americans work. First, they want to know who the 30,000 are, where they are from, and their names. The Americans are not that easy. Whatever they want [to be] done, first they send a plan, and then they see if it can be executed or not. If they see that it can be executed, then they take the next step, and then the next, and so on. If we say we have 100,000 people and send arms, that's not how it works at all. What the Americans say is, "This is how much we can help," irrespective of how many people there are. They sent the planes. Only when His Holiness came to Tsöna did the Americans say "Don't come and we will really help." They were saying to stay and they would send the arms. By then, things could not be stopped [people started coming].

**Q:** [It was] too late, right?

**A:** [It was] not too late [to fight], but once the mimang started coming to India, then they could not be stopped. If an organization was to be started once again, [they said] that they would help. They said that forcefully. They said not to come out. They said to remain and they would even send "soldiers [Tib. mi tang gi yin]". Anyway, I have it all in my book.

**Q:** Now, if we talk in terms of time—Athar and Lotse were dropped at Samye in 1957, August. After that, the drop was made in Litang. For about six months or so, they just hung around the Lhasa area.

**A:** At first, they did not hear anything about Chushigandru. Andru Jinda was in Lhasa. But since our government was in Lhasa, they were sent to find out what our [government's] policy was and what the relations were between the Chinese and Tibetans. When they got there, then Andru Jinda went to Drigutang.

**Q:** Yes, I wanted to ask you this. They were dropped in August '57, and so they were around Lhasa and those areas for about six months or so. So in the summer of '58, Chushigandru went to Lhoka. Then, after eight or nine months, the uprising in Lhasa started. So was this period too short to do some training, et cetera?

**A:** There wasn't any.

**Q:** Weren't they supposed to train in Drigutang?

**A:** They did not train in Drigutang. It was only for arms dropping. They did not have time for guerrilla training.

**Q:** So did Athar and Lhotse not train [people]?

**A:** Yes, they did for arms dropping and a little bit of other things. The main base was in Lhagyari and there they did some training.

**Q:** Therefore, as I see it, it looks like they were just starting to train and then the uprising took place. So, from the time factor, this is how it looks to me. What do you think?

**A:** Yes, that's correct. They had just dropped the arms when His Holiness came to Lhoka. Athar and Lotse had not given the arms. Nearby, there were 200-300 people whom the arms were given to, and they accompanied His Holiness. No thorough training was done.

**Q:** You went to the States. Where did you go and what did you do?

**A:** At first I went to Virginia, where they trained. This was temporary and after four to five, I was sent to Colorado where things were well-established.

**Q:** What did you do there?

**A:** As soon as I began the training there, I returned. They were starting when I arrived there and I stayed for one to two months, and then I was recalled. We were about 12 people.

**Q:** That's it. Thank you.